Chapter 23

YAAWN!
I'LL SEE TO BREAKFAST MYSELF.
I'D LIKE YOU TO GET STARTED ON THE ROOMS.
WE CAN'T LET A SINGLE MINUTE OF THE DAY GO TO WASTE!
ALL RIGHT.
SCRUB-BING FLOORS FIRST THING...
THAT HOUSE-KEEPER SURE IS WORKING ME TO THE BONE...
SQUEAK
SQUEAK
SHE MAY EVEN BE TOUGHER THAN HONG-NIANG.
I FEEL AS IF THERE'S OTHER WORK I COULD BE DOING...
...BUT I HONESTLY HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TO DO AS JINSHI'S ATTENDANT.

Chapter 23 The Inner Court Classroom

THERE'S NO REASON TO DO MORE UNTIL I'VE BEEN TOLD TO.
OH WELL ...
YOU SCARED ME...
IF YOU'RE WONDERING ABOUT BREAKFAST, LADY SUIREN'S PREPARING IT AS WE SPEAK...
BABUMP ドキ
ドキ BABUMP
WAH!
STARE じっ
HAVE I DONE SOME-THING WRONG?
こっそり SNEAK
DID HE FIND OUT THAT I PLANTED MEDICINAL HERB SEEDS IN THE GARDEN ON THE SLY?
OH NO!
AGH!

すっSHP
THEY WOULD LIKE TO RETAIN YOU AS INSTRUC-TOR.
Maomao
OH YES?
THE NEW PURE CONSORT IS HERE.
AS SUCH, THE INNER COURT HAS REQUESTED TRAINING ON HER BEHALF.
GUESS MY SECRET IS SAFE FOR NOW.
FLAP
THE FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY IS RIDING ON HER EDUCA-TION.
THERE'S ALSO THIS.
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I'M JOKING?
WHAT A VERY FUNNY JOKE.
GRAB

Crystal Palace Lihua
A RECOMMENDATION FROM A PRINCIPAL CONSORT HERSELF.
LIHUA
WHY WOULD CONSORT LIHUA ...?
I HAVE NO IDEA WHY SHE'D—
OH!
...THAT MUST'VE DONE IT...

HEE HEE!
I CAN JUST IMAGINE HOW THOROUGHLY AMUSED CONSORT GYOKUYO MUST HAVE BEEN AS SHE WROTE THIS...
WITH TWO PRINCIPAL CONSORTS BEHIND IT, THE REQUEST BECAME IMPOS-SIBLE TO IGNORE.
SHE'S EVEN OFFERED A HAND-SOME REWARD IN EXCHANGE FOR MY SERVICES ...
THE FOLLOWING DAY, A SIMILAR ENDORSE-MENT ARRIVED FROM CONSORT GYOKUYO.
GUESS IT'S NOT GOING AWAY...
A FEW DAYS LATER ...
WHABAM
AMOUNT PAYABLE

NEVER LET IT BE SAID I DON'T LEARN FROM MY ELDERS !!
SNEAK コソ…
SWISH
PEEK ちら
THAT'S SOME MARKUP, OLD LADY.
JUMP ピクッ!!
WHAT'S ALL THIS?
HUH ...?!
TEACHING MATERIALS FOR THE CLASS.
BABUMP ドキ
BABUMP ドキ
HERE'S THE BILL.
HMM, IT COMES TO THAT MUCH?
PUSH

AS LONG AS THIS CRAFTY HOUSE-KEEPER'S AROUND, FLEECING JINSHI WILL BE A CHAL-LENGE.
SHE'S GOOD...
HAVE THEM WRITE UP A NEW ONE.
HERE.
FWIP
HMM.
I DARESAY THE COLOR OF THE INK IS DIFFERENT ON JUST THAT ONE DIGIT...
HEE HEE!
ひょこっ
POP
GASP
LET ME HAVE A LOOK.
SO WHAT EXACTLY DID YOU PROCURE FOR THE CLASS?

GLARE
ZOOM
I CAN'T LET HIM SEE MY PRECIOUS CLASS MATERIALS.
I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT WHATEVER YOU SET OUT TO DO, YOU SHOULD DO IT RIGHT.
HISSSSS
O-OKAY, THEN. I'LL PASS.
EAST THERE. NICE KITTY.
XIAO-MAO.
SHALL I HELP CARRY THAT FOR YOU?
THANKS, BUT NO THANKS.
PEEK
PEEK
LOITER
LOITER

AND SO, THE DAY OF THE CLASS ARRIVED ...
IT'S BEEN TOO LONG SINCE I WAS LAST HERE IN THE INNER COURT.
MAYBE IT HAS TO DO WITH BEING RAISED IN THE PLEASURE DISTRICT, BUT I STRANGELY FEEL MORE AT EASE WHEN I'M SURROUNDED BY WOMEN.
THERE IT IS.
THE CLASS IS TO BE HELD IN A LECTURE HALL ONCE USED AS A DORMITORY DURING THE PREVIOUS EMPEROR'S REIGN.
BACK THEN, THERE WERE A GREAT MANY MAIDS SERVING THE INNER COURT AND NOWHERE TO HOUSE THEM, SO THE LECTURE HALL WAS REPURPOSED.
UNDER THE CURRENT EMPEROR, HOWEVER, THE HALL HAS FALLEN, FOR THE MOST PART, INTO DISUSE.
THE LESSONS ARE MEANT ONLY FOR THE FOUR PRINCIPAL CONSORTS AND THEIR LADIES.
WHAT AM I TO DO WITH SUCH A GRAND SPACE?
HMM?
WHY IS THERE A CROWD?
OH!

AHHH!
EEEEE!

IS THIS CLASS SUCH A BIG DEAL?
JOSTLE
JOSTLE
SO HE HAS DEVOTEES AMONG EVEN THE MID-RANKING CONCU-BINES...
SIR JINSHI!
ELEGANT AS EVER, I SEE!

THIS CLASS IS FOR THE FOUR PRINCIPAL CONSORTS ALONE.
JUST TO BE CLEAR...

IS THIS MAN ACTUALLY SOME KIND OF SUPER-NATURAL BEING IN DISGUISE ...?
DOES HE LAY ENCHANT-MENTS UNAWARES ON ALL AROUND HIM?
CREEEAK
...
MELT
MELT
SHOCK
EVERYONE ELSE, PLEASE RETURN TO YOUR RESPECTIVE POSTS.
HMM?
...WHY NOT?
WHAT IS IT?
STOP THERE !!
YOU CAN'T COME IN.

PUSH
PUSH
OOF.
HE'S STURDIER THAN HE LOOKS.
DIDN'T YOU JUST SAY THAT THE CLASS IS ONLY FOR THE FOUR CONSORTS?
CLATTER
?
...LIES A SAFE SPACE FOR WOMEN'S SECRETS TO BE SHARED, SECRETS WHICH ARE NOT MEANT TO BE UTTERED BEYOND THESE DOORS!
PAST THIS POINT...
SLAM
44

HEE HEE!
HEE HEE!
PHEW...
HEE HEE!
HEE HEE!

AND HONG-NIANG'S JUST AS I REMEMBER.
CON-SORT GYO-KUYO.
STILL A BEAUTY.
CON-SORT LIHUA.
AND HERE WE HAVE THE ANXIOUS CONSORT LISHU, COWERING YET AGAIN.
I'M GLAD SHE SEEMS TO BE IN GOOD HEALTH TOO.
HER LUSCIOUS CURVES HAVE RETURNED IN FULL FORCE, I SEE.

IT'S TO BE EXPECTED WITH THE OTHER THREE PRINCIPAL CONSORTS HERE...
...BUT SHE'S GOT THAT ATTENDANT OF HERS WATCHING OVER HER NOW, SO I'D SAY SHE'D DOING A SIGHT BETTER THAN BEFORE.
AND LAST...
THIS MUST BE THE NEW CONSORT, THE ONE WHO TOOK UP THE TITLE OF PURE CONSORT AFTER LADY ADUO.
I'D HEARD CONSORT LOULAN AND I ARE THE SAME AGE.
GOING BY THAT ALONE, SHE'S PROBABLY READY TO SHARE HER BED WITH THE EMPEROR.
HER FEATURES MAKE ME THINK SHE'S FROM THE NORTH...
...BUT THE HEAVY COSMETICS ACCENTU-ATING THE CORNERS OF HER EYES...
...HIDE THEIR TRUE SHAPE.
LOULAN THE PURE CONSORT

DESPITE THE UNIQUE LOOK...
SHE'S DRESSED IN THE SOUTHERN STYLE, RIGHT DOWN TO HER HAIR ORNA-MENTS...
EVEN HER LADY-IN-WAITING IS WEARING SIMILAR ATTIRE...
...WHICH MAKES HER STAND OUT AMONG THE CONSORTS.
...I CAN'T SAY I SENSE ...
...THE SAME KIND OF CHARM AND RADIANCE THAT I GET FROM THE OTHER THREE.
...SO PERHAPS THE STYLE IS SIMPLY HER PERSONAL PREFER-ENCE.
SHE DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO DISRUPT THE HARMONY OF THE INNER COURT.
AHEM!
WELL ...
...WHAT DO I CARE?

I AM MAOMAO, AND I SHALL BE YOUR TEACHER TODAY.
BOW
TAK
SHWP
SHWP
WHAT I AM ABOUT TO SHARE WITH YOU ALL ARE SECRET TECHNIQUES THAT ARE FOR YOUR EYES AND EARS ALONE.
I HUMBLY ASK THAT YOU NOT REMOVE THE DOCUMENTS AND MATERIALS I AM ABOUT TO HAND YOU FROM THE PREMISES.

NOW, PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 3.
50

HUSH
UM, SIR JINSHI...
CLANK
DON'T ASK ME.
WHAT IN THE WORLD COULD BE GOING ON WITHIN, I WONDER?

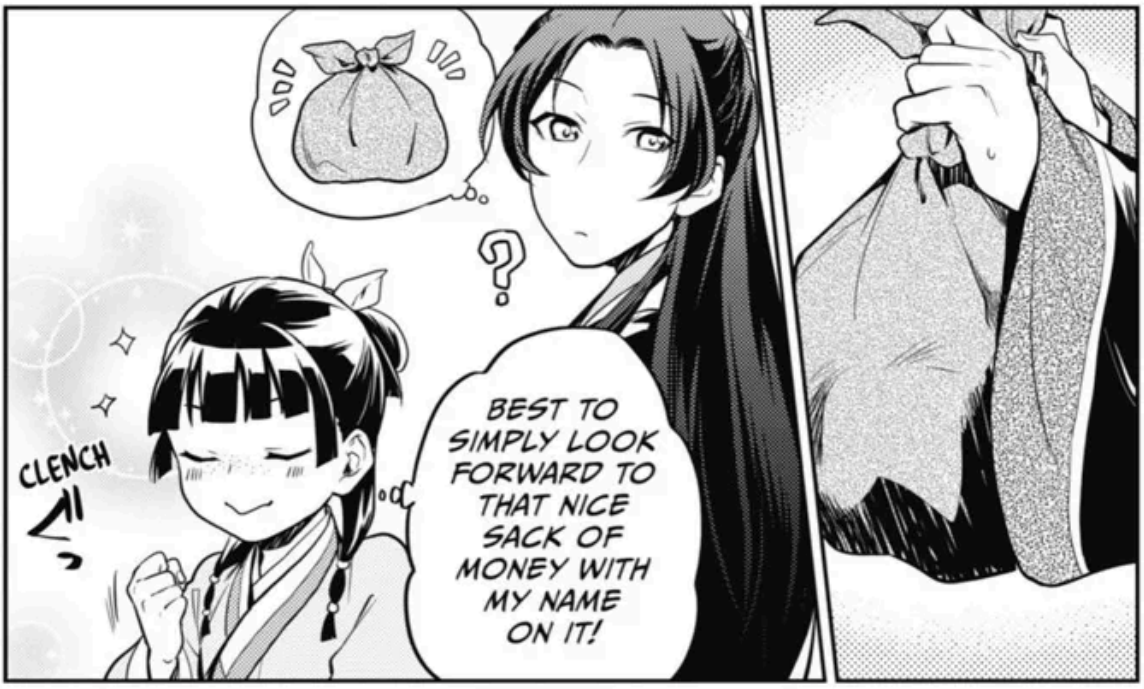
I'M BEAT.
WHEW...
IT'S OVER.
HE WAS EAVES-DROPPING, WASN'T HE?
AHEM!
THANKS FOR YOUR EFFORTS. THAT CERTAINLY TOOK A WHILE.
SWSH
HEY.
IS SOME-THING WRONG?

WE'LL GET OUT OF OUR RUT YET!
I CAN'T.
THAT'S JUST TOO MUCH TO ASK!
BONK
BONK
WHAT IN HEAVEN'S NAME DID YOU GET UP TO IN HERE?
WHATEVER DO YOU MEAN?

...THE TWO WHO VOUCHED FOR ME APPEAR TO BE PLEASED.
THAT SAID ...
I SIMPLY INSTRUCTED THEM AS YOU ASKED.
.....
...IT MIGHT HAVE ALL BEEN A BIT TOO MUCH FOR CONSORT LISHU.
HOW-EVER ...
URK...

?
FWIP
AS FOR THIS ONE... I HAD NO CLUE WHAT SHE WAS THINKING THE ENTIRE TIME.
57

OH, DO WHATEVER YOU WANT.
STRIDE
STRIDE


CLENCH
BEST TO SIMPLY LOOK FORWARD TO THAT NICE SACK OF MONEY WITH MY NAME ON IT!

THE NEXT DAY
WHY DON'T YOU ASK THE EMPEROR?
SO JUST WHAT KIND OF CLASS DID YOU HOLD?